

IN THE MUSIC WORKS OF RACHMANINOFF'S INTERPRETATION OF CHOPIN

Genius's Prerogatives Surpass Privileges of Mere Talent

Executive Musicians Sometimes Err in Supposing That the Essential Trick in Performance Is to Do Things Differently.

By W. J. HENDERSON.

THE amateur magician has a pretty good experience, if everything does not go wrong. He has spent much time in learning to make the pass with cards and to palm a coin. He has his plain brass ring carefully sewed into the corner of a handkerchief and his quarter fastened to the end of a string of rubber extending up his sleeve. He has simple apparatus and has worked hard to perfect his sleight of hand.

After his parlor entertainment has come to its fairly successful conclusion all his young friends gather around him and ask him how "it is done." That indeed is the vital question. It is asked in all departments of human activity. How is it done? It's a trick, of course. There is some hocus pocus about it, and if we could only find out what it is we could fool people too.

The revolutionist believes that there is some trick by which the wicked capitalist gets money and he cannot. Therefore not knowing the trick he hopes to be able to take the money away from the capitalist by force. The politician thinks that gaining the popular vote is a trick and when some chap like Coolidge comes along and—as he believes—furnishes a new trick such as putting a recalcitrant police force in its place, he wonders how he can get the knack of doing something of that sort.

The free verse poet fancies that the trick of acquiring literary fame is in writing shattered prose and embalming in it commonplace ideas spasmodically expressed. The ultra modern painter cheers himself onward in the race for glory with the hope that the blue tomato will make him immortal. And the musician deludes himself with the dream that the invention of new discords is the open sesame to universal applause.

Rachmaninoff's Reading of a Chopin Sonata.

If, however, he chances to be not a composer but an executive musician he may fall into the error of supposing that the essential trick in performance is to do things as they have never been done before—not better, but differently. Now this is a dangerous method. When Mr. Rachmaninoff gave his own reading of Chopin's B flat minor sonata last Sunday the writer of this department said that the caprice of the artist had always existed, but that Mr. Rachmaninoff's interpretation was something greater than caprice. Therefore it was more nearly just to phrase the thought that the royal prerogatives of genius transcended the privileges of mere talent.

Which is merely another way of saying that such masters as Paderewski, Hofmann and Rachmaninoff may offer us interpretations which might be regarded as presumptuous if presented by Henry Jones of Ozark making his debut. The reviewer of musical doings, if he be a person of experience, does not pounce upon every new reading and condemn it because it differs from that which has the sanction of time.

Critics and music lovers are not the authorities in these matters. Great masters of music are. It is not for us to tell them what is right and wrong. It is for them to tell us.

If they are guilty of cheap sensationalism in the search after renewed public interest the fact reveals itself. It is its own punishment. In music as in other departments of human activity the immortal words of Lincoln apply. You cannot fool all of the public all of the time.

But when a truly great musical mind comes before us with a new interpretation, which is the product of profound thought and honest search after true beauty we must accord to that reading the respect which is its just due. Trying to be original for the mere sake of originality is not worth while. Nothing important in art has ever been accomplished that way.

Inspiration cannot be commanded. But in most departments of human activity it comes to the person whose mind has been prepared for it by long training as well as by natural aptitude. If Mozart had not been a consummate master of counterpoint his inspiration would never have created the fugue treatment in the last movement of the "Jupiter" symphony.

Napoleon used to say that battles were won by the sudden birth of an idea in the mind of a commanding officer at a critical moment. But the force that brought that idea to birth was military genius. If the General had not known all the details of his profession and possessed that supreme grasp of them which enabled him to coordinate facts in the twinkling of an eye, and at the same moment to perceive perfectly their relations to one another, the inspiration would not have come to him.

To refer to a humbler walk in life, it may be instructive to note that Capt. Michael Ahearn's brilliant inspiration about a method of clearing up the traffic angle in West Fifth street did not occur to any one but a trained policeman. It has been noted that world moving discoveries in medical science are generally made by doctors and that clever ways of securing checkmates are devised by chess players, not by home run hitters.

Declaration of Schumann.

Theodore Winkler after teaching Wagner counterpoint for half a year said to him, "What you have learned by this dry study is self-deception." Schumann declared that "mastery of form leads talent to ever-increasing freedom." Both rested their pronouncements on the same basic truths, namely, that the man who is master of his craft is ready to perform a portion where he may be the master of other men.

And that is the secret of how it is done.

When it comes to the invention of ideas or readings one master does not teach another much. Wagner, for example, started life a professed worshipper of Mozart and wrote a piano sonata in imitation of his style. Where is that sonata now? Dead and buried, along with all the other imitations of Mozart. Richard Strauss and Charles Gounod, Saint-Saens and Debussy were all devoted adherents of Mozart. And they learned much from him. The one thing they could not learn was to write like Mozart. And if they had learned that they would not have been Strauss and Gounod, Saint-Saens and Debussy. They would have been mere shadows cast by the sunlight.

As for the men and women who interpret music and who chiefly excite our curiosity as to how it is done, one thing can be said with assurance, namely, that it is not done by chance, but after long and hard study. An amiable gentleman called Richter used to be greatly disturbed by the ease with which Mozart played the piano. He exclaimed: "Mein Gott! how I am obliged to torment myself and sweat, and yet without obtaining applause! And for you, my friend, it is mere play." Whereupon Mozart re-

Opera and Concert Artists in Current Programs



EVELYN LEVIN IN RECITAL AT CARNEGIE HALL

MARIA JERIZA AS THAIS AT THE METROPOLITAN

JEANNE GONDON AS PRINCESS ESOL IN 'DON CARLOS' AT THE METROPOLITAN

LOIS LANG, SOPRANO, IN SONG RECITAL AT TOWN HALL

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Jeriza as 'Thais' for First Time Thursday

"Thais," the next "revival" promised by Mr. Gatti-Casazza, will be presented at the Metropolitan next Thursday evening with Mme. Jeriza in the title role. It will be her first appearance anywhere in this opera and the first time she has sung an operatic role in French.

With her will appear Mr. Whitehill as Athanasios and Mr. Harold as Nicolas. Others in the cast will be Meses. Ryan, Egner and Telva and Messrs. D'Angelo and Reschlin. The opera has been musically prepared and will be conducted by Louis Hasselmann, with the stage direction in charge of Wilhelm von Wymetal. The chorus has been rehearsed by Mr. Giulio Setti and the dances arranged by Miss Rosina Galli, who with Mr. Bonfiglio will take part therein.

New scenery has been designed and painted by Joseph Urban and new costumes designed by his daughter, Miss Grotel Urban, have been made in the Metropolitan atelier.

"Yes, but I had to labor once in order not to show labor now."

High Lords of Musical Art.

Furthermore, all these high lords of musical art know not only how they do things, but why. Their readings may not always convince us as being correct, but they carry with them the force of authority because they originate in big musical minds. There are a dozen reasons for pronouncing Rachmaninoff's performance of the funeral march in Chopin's B flat minor sonata wrong and almost indefensible. There is one reason for declaring it admirable. That reason is the reading itself. When you hear it you are mastered by it. Your judgment cries aloud within you that, although this is Chopin edited by Rachmaninoff, it is an immortal master communicating his message through a supreme medium.

Beethoven Through Artistic Eyes.

It has been said before that no man can rise above himself. No interpretative musician can see Beethoven except through his own artistic eyes. If he steps himself for years in the atmosphere of great musical thought, if he lives with Bach and Beethoven and the prophets, if he is minutely possessed by the most powerful ambition of every first-rate man, namely, to do his work well, and if he has acquired a complete technique, then when the moment of great vision comes to him he will be like Napoleon in the heat of battle.

He will not only instantly perceive what ought to be done, but he will also know precisely how to do it.

Is this answering the question, "How is it done?" Not quite. It cannot be perfectly answered. That part of the process which cannot be explained is purely spiritual. It is easy enough to discern the characteristic differences between such artists as Rachmaninoff and Paderewski, but it would not be a simple matter to determine how they came to exist. Certain psychological matters are no nearer clearing up now than they were fifty years ago. What is the state of an idea when it is not present before the consciousness? The psychologists have never been able to tell us that. All they know is that under certain conditions the idea appears before the consciousness again and we call that remembering.

How the Napoleons come to see in a lightning flash of thought the precise thing that ought to be done in a battle, how a Mozart at the immature age of 12 could write an opera which is still pleasing, how a Beethoven at a position where he may be the master of other men.

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